

Alexander Dalrymple, forgotten man of Easter Island history

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The Dutch-language narratives of Jacob Roggeveen's voyage to the Pacific in 1722 when Easter Island was discovered were given exhaustive treatment in Herbert von Saher's article 'Roggeveen and Boumann: an inventory of all the narratives' (RNJ 7(4):77-82). However, a few points about English-language versions of those same narratives still need to be made to put Captain Cook's visit to Easter Island in 1774 in its historical perspective.

According to Mr von Saher, the only material by which Roggeveen's voyage could be judged before his own journal was published in 1838 comprised:

- 1) An anonymous narrative published in Amsterdam in 1727.
- 2) A second anonymous narrative published in Dordrecht in 1728.
- 3) A book by C.F. Behrens, a companion of Roggeveen, first published in Amsterdam in 1732, with a German edition in 1737 and French and German editions in 1739.

4) An English translation of the anonymous accounts published in John Hamilton Moore's *A New and Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels*, London, 1778.

In fact, at least three accounts of Roggeveen's voyage had appeared in English before Cook left England on his second voyage to the Pacific of 1772-1775. The first, a summary of the French translation of Behren's account, was published in John Callander's *Terra Australis Cognita: or Voyages to the Terra Australis, or Southern Hemisphere*, vol.3 (Edinburgh 1768). The next was an abstract of Behrens' account which appeared in the *Universal Magazine*, London, for February 1770. And the third account, by far the most important, was a chapter entitled 'The voyage of Jacob Roggeveen, 1722' in the second volume of Alexander Dalrymple's *An Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific* (London 1771).

Dalrymple (1737-1808), a man of vast geographical knowledge and an enthusiastic believer in a southern continent, was originally appointed to command HMS *Endeavour* on its voyage to the Pacific. However, he was

deprived of that honor when the British Admiralty insisted on a naval man and Lieutenant James Cook was given the job (Fry 1970).

Dalrymple's volume of 1771 was devoted solely to the Dutch voyages to the Pacific. It was a companion to one on the Spanish voyages that had appeared the previous year. The chapter on Roggeveen's voyage begins:

Two relations have been published of this voyage, the one anonymous in Dutch, printed at Dort [sic] in 1728, 4to. reprinted 1758; the other in German at Leipsick, 1738; of it a

French translation was published at the Hague in 1739, in 2 vols, 12mo. This last was by Charles Frederick Behrens, a native of Mecklenburgh, serjeant of the troops aboard the squadron. I have not seen the German original, the French translation is therefore followed: it is a very poor performance, written with much ignorance, though with a parade of knowledge. The author of the *Lives of the Governors of Batavia* says the original journal, which he had in his possession, is very consonant to the Hague relation; but the only place whose situation he mentions is $1\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ different in latitude, and double that in longitude, from the Hague publication: his assertion is therefore no testimony in its behalf.

The Dutch narrative is very different from the French in situations and dates; I have therefore inserted each separately, as a distinct relation, after making Easter Island. It appears [to] me that the author of the French relation kept no journal, and writes from memory,

but his narrative seems to be faithful in the recital of those things he saw; and in many circumstances is confirmed by the Dutch relation, which appears to be an abstract of sea-journal, to which the circumstances of description have been added, perhaps, from verbal report, with some exaggeration towards the marvellous, particularly about giants; of which I am assured by a very ingenious and worthy Dutch gentleman that there was no mention made in the MS journal of the voyage which he once had in his possession.

After briefly outlining the antecedents of Roggeveen's



Dalrymple

From: Howard T. Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808) and the Expansion of British Trade*, Frank Cass, London

voyage as given in the French translation of Behren's account, Dalrymple presented a 23-page English version of that translation and then a 10-page 'Extract of the Dutch Relation' from which 'many digressions in the original, entirely foreign to the subject' were omitted.

The volume came out in the same year that Cook returned to England from his *Endeavour* voyage. When he left on his second voyage in July 1772, he took both it and the Spanish volume with him. By then, news of the Gonzalez expedition's voyage to Easter Island from Peru in 1770 had also reached England and reports had been published in *Lloyd's Evening Post*, the *London Chronicle* and *St James Chronicle* (Corney 1908:153,157). Cook was thus already aware of the island's existence and that two expeditions had visited it.

Cook's editor, J.C. Beaglehole (1961:lxxxiv) says that Dalrymple's volumes 'could never have had a more devoted reader' than Cook as they presented earlier discoveries in the Pacific as a series that could be checked, 'with enough detail to make identification possible'. Cook, not surprisingly, had Dalrymple's Dutch volume at his elbow as his ship neared Easter Island on 13 March 1774. His journal for that day begins: 'Sunday 13th. In stretching in for the land we discovered people and those Moniments [sic] or Idols mentioned by the Authors of Roggewein's voyage which left us in no room to doubt but it was Easter Island' (Beaglehole 1961:338). A day later, Cook wrote:

Before I sail'd from England, I was informed that a Spanish ship had visited this isle in 1769 [sic], some signs of it was seen among the people now about us. One man had a pretty good broad brim'd European hat on; a nother had a red silk handkerchief. They also seemed to know the use of a musket (of which they stood in much awe) but this they probably learned from Roggewein, who, if we are to believe the authors of that Voyage, left them sufficient tokens.

I little further on Cook wrote: 'I did not see a Man in this Isle that measured Six feet so far are they from being giants as one of the authors of Roggewein's voyage asserts'. Again: 'It appears by the accounts of Roggewein's voyage that these people had no better Vessels than when he first visited them'. And again: 'The gigantic Statues so often mentioned, are in my opinion not looked upon as Idols by the present inhabitants, whatever they might be in the days of the Dutch'

Cook's erudite companion J.R. Forster does not seem to have had a copy of Dalrymple's book with him; nor, apparently, did he see Cook's as he does not mention it in his journal (Hoare 1982). However, Forster's son George looked it up on his return to England and referred to it a couple of times in his book *A Voyage Round the World*, 2 vols (London 1777). In vol.1, p.556, he says, for example, that a canoe paddle made of several pieces of wood corresponded exactly with the Dutch account of Roggewein's voyage printed at Dort in 1728. This sufficiently proved that the island was 'very destitute of wood', although the contrary was asserted in 'the serjeant major's relation of the voyage'.

A noteworthy aspect of Dalrymple's own view of Easter Island is that he was convinced that it would prove to be an

outlier of the southern continent. In the introduction to his volume on the Spanish voyages, he wrote:

Whoever considers the Peruvian empire, where arts and industry flourished under one of the wisest systems of government, which was founded by a stranger, must have very sanguine expectations of the Southern Continent, from whence it is more than probable Mango Capac, the first Inca was derived. . . . Whoever considers attentively Roggewein's description of Easter Island must see the affinity to the Peruvian manners and religion (Dalrymple 1770:xxix).

Considering the importance of Dalrymple's accounts of Roggewein's voyage to Cook, it is curious that most of the principle writers on Easter Island in the present century seem not to have known of Dalrymple's work. Three in particular should be mentioned. The earliest, Bolton Glanvill Corney (1908), included his own translations of the Easter Island section of Roggewein's journal and of Behren's account in the volume on the Gonzalez expedition that he translated and edited for the Hakluyt Society. Andrew Sharp (1970), the first to translate Roggewein's journal into English in its entirety, made no mention of Dalrymple's translation of Behren's account, although he frequently referred to statements by Behren. And Thor Heyerdahl who, in pre-Sharp days, relied on Corney for what the Dutch did and saw at Easter Island in 1722, still seems to be unaware that the first person to advocate a link between Easter Island and Peru was Dalrymple--no less than 182 years before his *American Indians in the Pacific* came out!! □

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